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Preservation Foundation

*A Voice*  
FOR  
PRESERVATION



# **Smiley-Brackett Cottage Local Landmark Designation**

**Planning Board  
November 18, 2021**

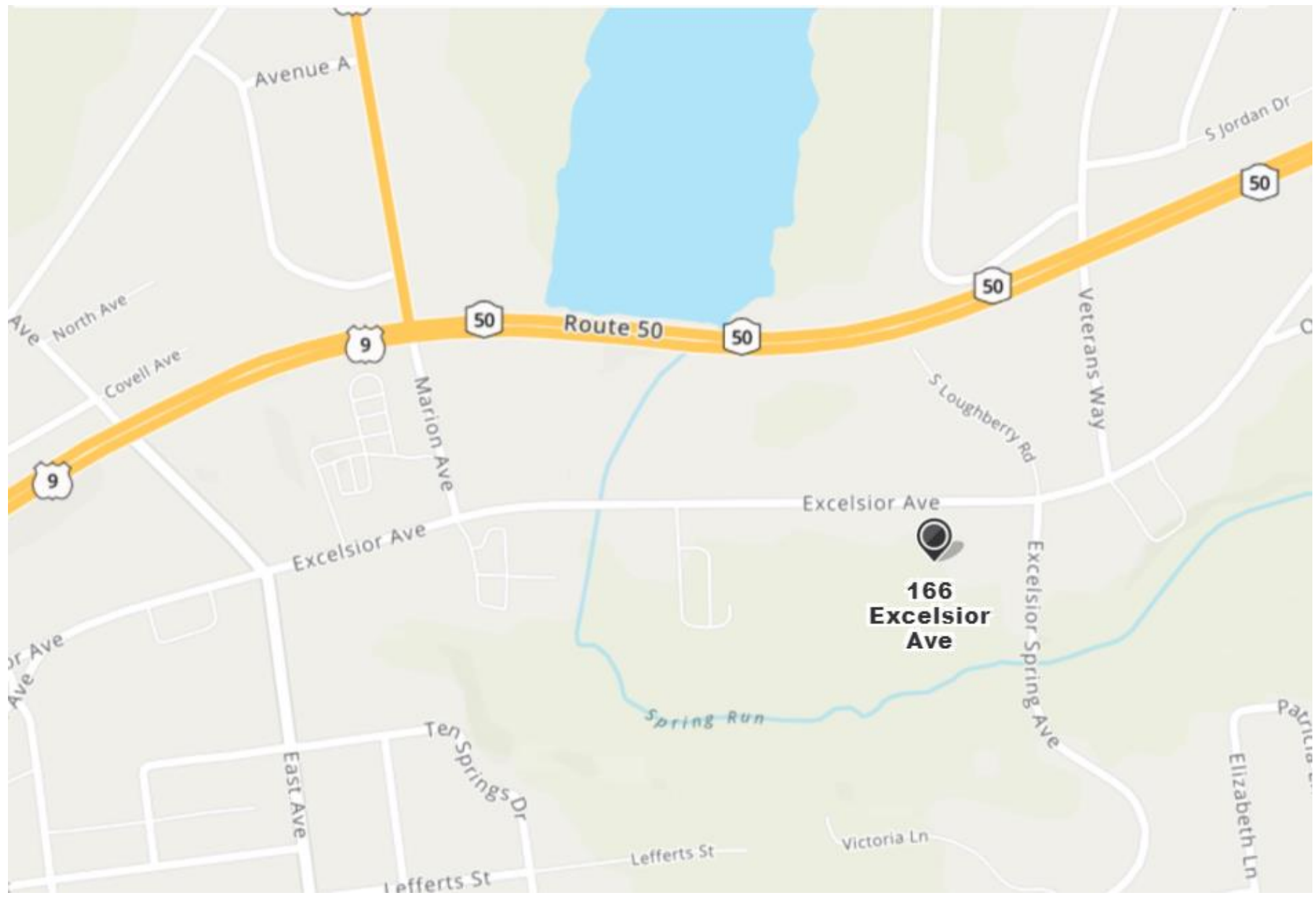


166 Excelsior Avenue

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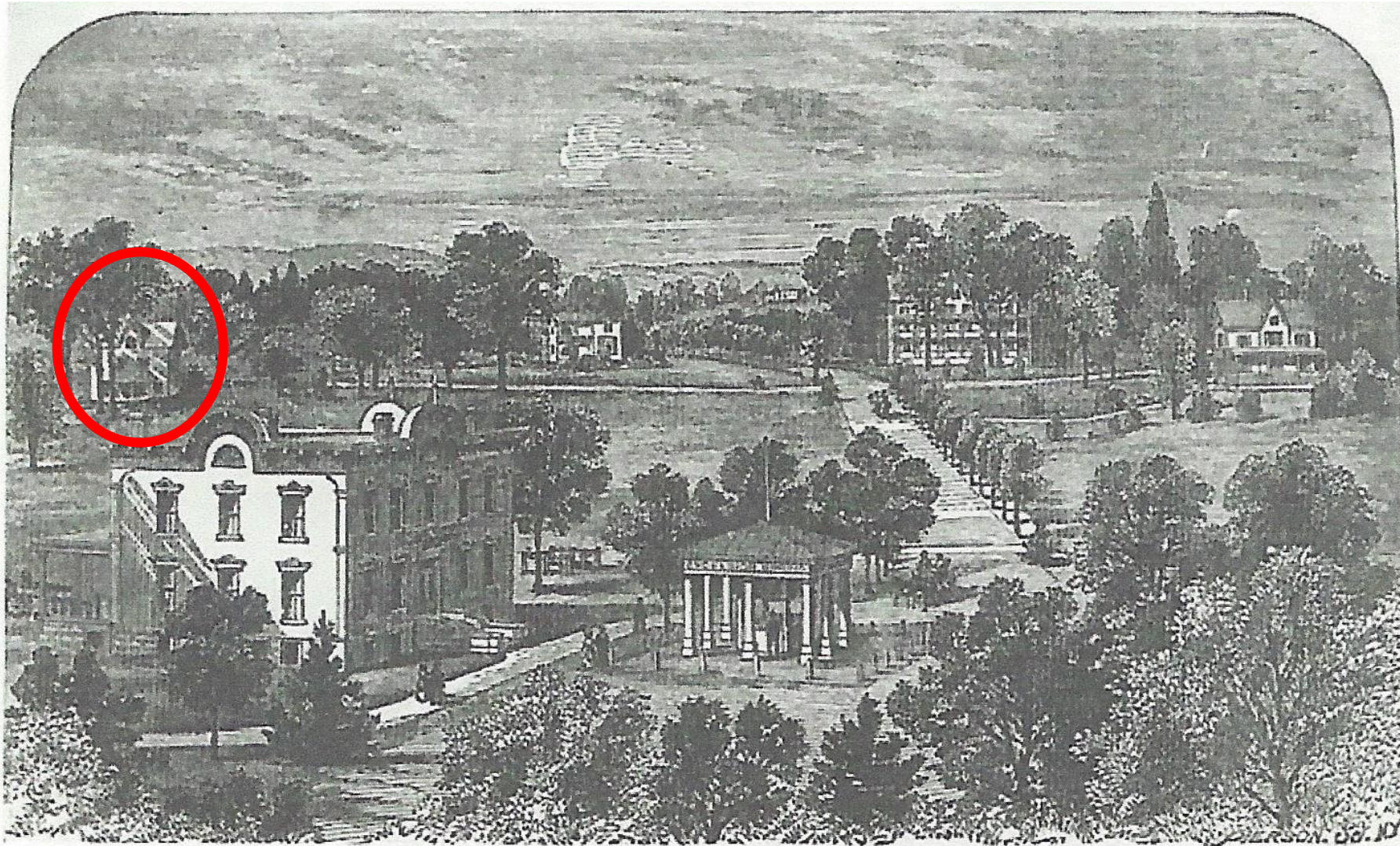
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*From engraving by P. R. B. Pearson, 1873*

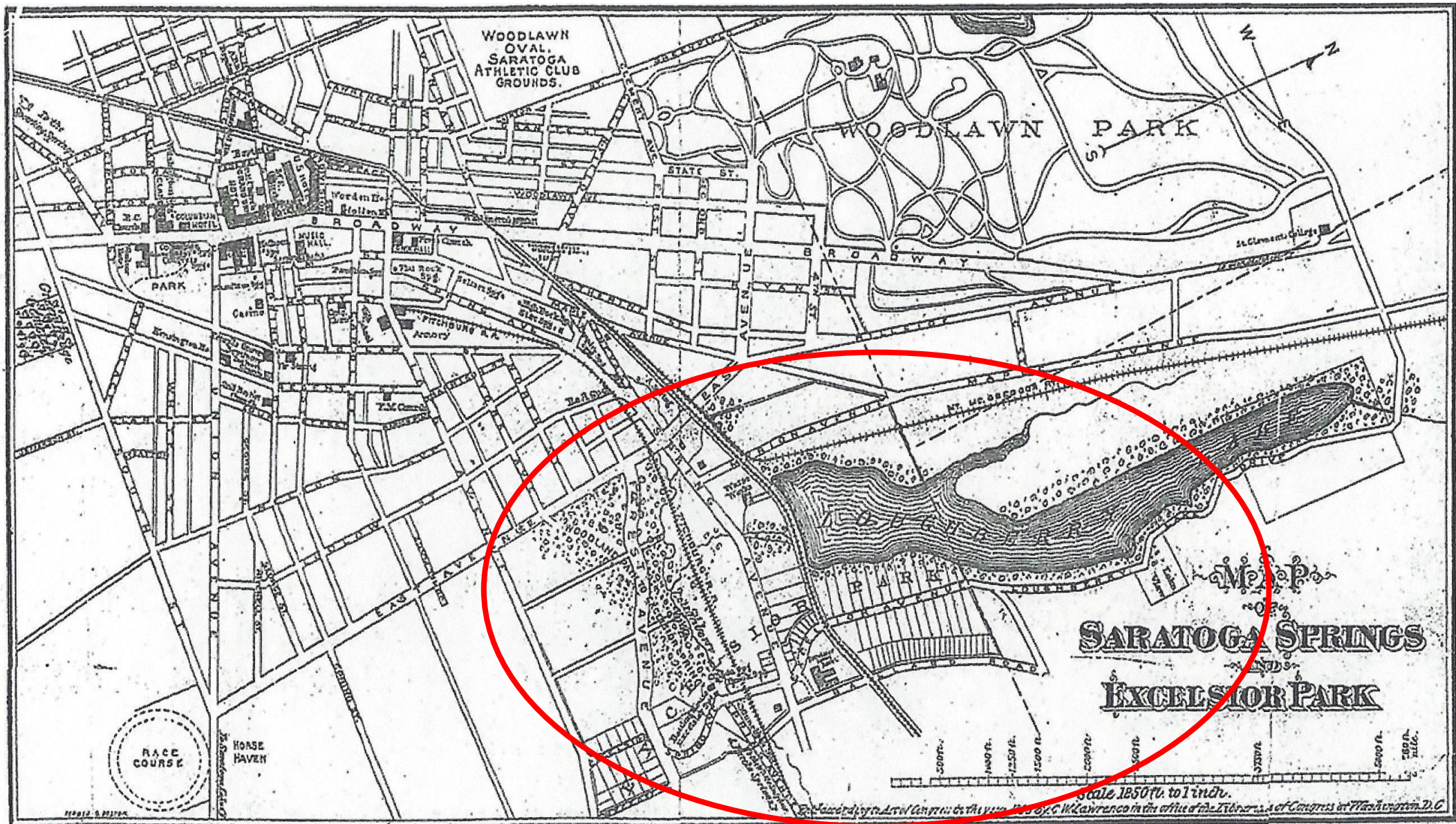
*Excelsior Spring, located in Excelsior Park*

1873 Engraving

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Excelsior Park & Springs 1895

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## Sarah Francis Smiley 1830 - 1917

In October 1872, Sarah F. Smiley acquired a 60' x 120' lot from Henry Lawrence in Excelsior Park and built a Gothic Revival Cottage.

A note in the September 19, 1872 *Saratogian* said that Miss Smiley had begun construction of a cottage and that the land was a gift from Mr. Lawrence.

She was born in 1830 in Vassalborough, Maine. The daughter of the Principal of the Friends Female College in Providence, Rhode Island. She came from a well-known Quaker family. Her father and brothers founded the Mohonk Mountain House in the Catskills in 1870.

After the Civil War she traveled south to be a relief worker, where she spoke to black and white audiences. "I went to relieve human suffering," Sarah said of her time as a relief worker in the South. She traveled to Virginia and North Carolina aiding Quakers and organizing schools and libraries. She help to start a school for 1,000 free Black adults and children in Richmond, Virginia.

Sarah received a commission to speak abroad in England where she was honored by the British Yearly Meeting of Orthodox Friends.

She developed a reputation for preaching and spoke before congregations of several denominations across the country and abroad.



MISS SARAH F. SMILEY, THE QUAKERESS PREACHER.  
[FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY W. H. WILLIAMSON, BROOKLYN.]

*"She speaks twice almost every day in the week... She only spends six months of the year in preaching. The remainder of the year during the summer months in diligent study in her cottage in Saratoga."*

*April 16, 1874 The Saratogian*

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*“Attracting crowds into churches...When she begins to speak she lifts her bonnet, and by the act seems to open up a fountain of beautiful and magnetic language.”*

*February 2, 1876 Wheeling Daily Intelligence Newspaper*

In 1872, she preached before a mixed audience of men and women at the Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, New York. The event was described by the February 11, 1872 *New York Herald* – “Dr. Cuyler had invited a sweet little duck of an unbaptized Quaker, Miss Smiley (happy name!) to preach in his church.”

According to *Harper’s Weekly*, Miss Smiley and Reverend Cuyler were criticized. “To teach and to exhort, or to lead in prayer in public and promiscuous assemblies is clearly forbidden to women in the Holy Oracles.”

“The Rev. Dr. Cuyler, of New York, was lately disciplined by his church authorities for the irregularity of letting Miss Smiley preach in his pulpit, but times have changed now, and the churches are thrown open to this now prophetess every where. The dark ago of dogma and creed discipline seems to be passing away, and the world has declared itself ready to hear anything that sounds like truth, from any source whatever ..It is but common courtesy to listen to what the women have to say.” - *February 2, 1876 Wheeling Daily Intelligence Newspaper.*

She was controversial for insisting that women could study the scriptures themselves, without the help of men. Sarah founded a home Bible study program for women.

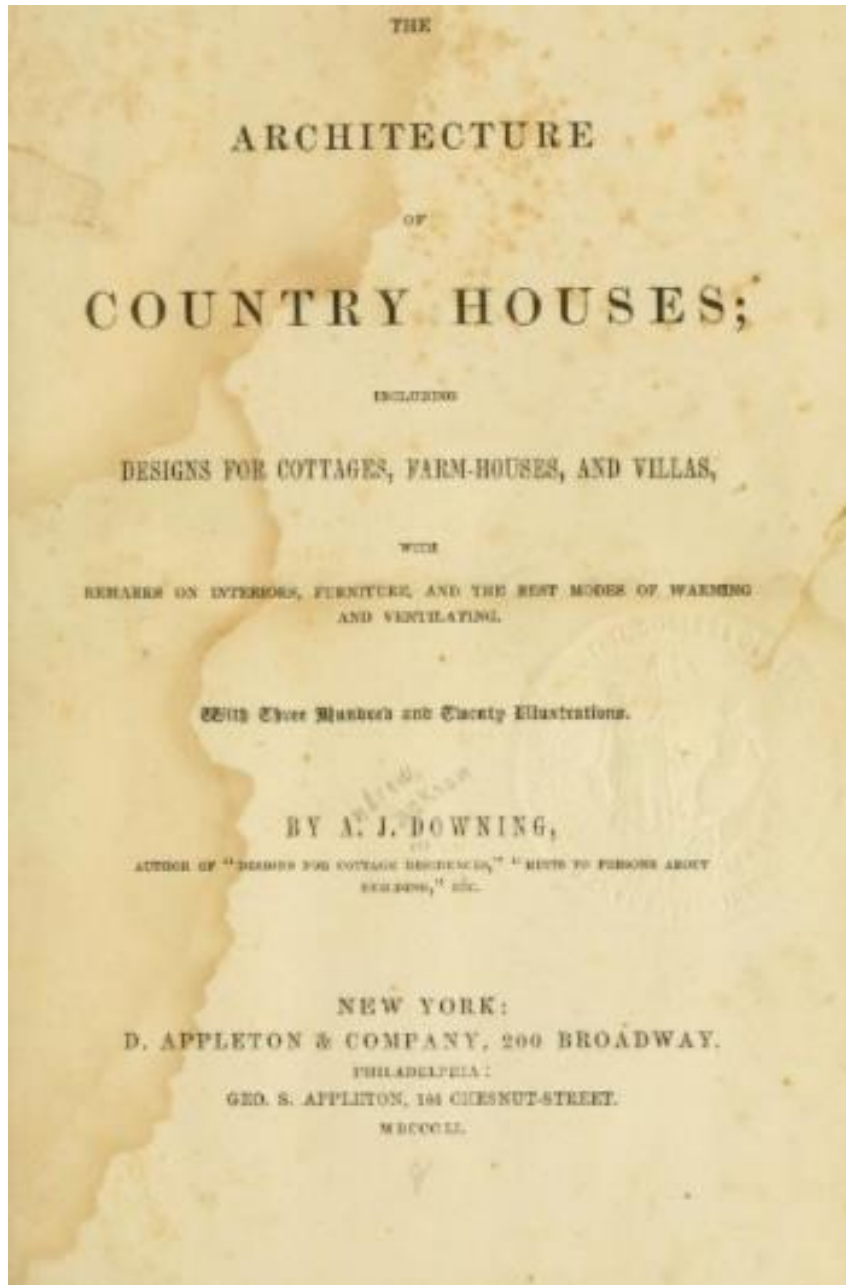
She was an author of five books – some of which are published today.

She also accumulated a library of over 5,000 volumes of books that she later donated.

Upon her death in 1917, the cottage was left to The Society for the Home Study of Holy Scripture and Church History, a group she founded to promote religious study by mail.

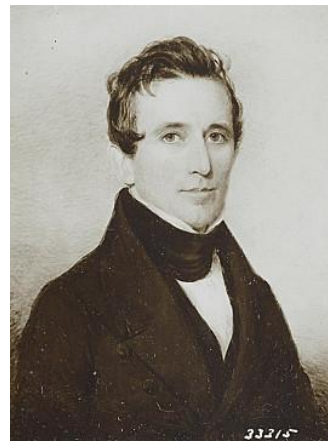
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Andrew Jackson Downing

A. J. Downing was an American landscape designer, horticulturist, and writer. He was a prominent advocate for the Gothic Revival style. He is considered the founder of American landscape architecture. He wrote the book *Architecture of Country Houses*, in partnership with Alexander Jackson Davis. It featured Gothic Revival cottages, including one similar to the Smiley-Brackett Cottage.



Alexander Jackson Davis

Davis was the first American architect to champion Gothic domestic buildings. His 1837 book, *Rural Residences*, was the first house plan book published in the United States. He was the first to show three-dimensional views complete with floor plans.

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DESIGN VII  
SYMMETRICAL COTTAGE

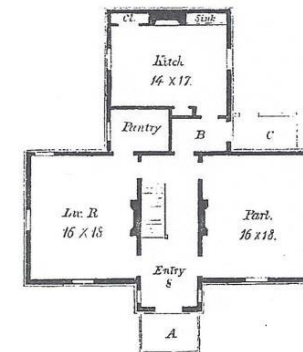


The Gothic Revival style was popularized by Andrew Jackson Downing. He published *Cottage Residences* (1842) and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850). Alexander Jackson Davis designed and drew the illustrations featured.

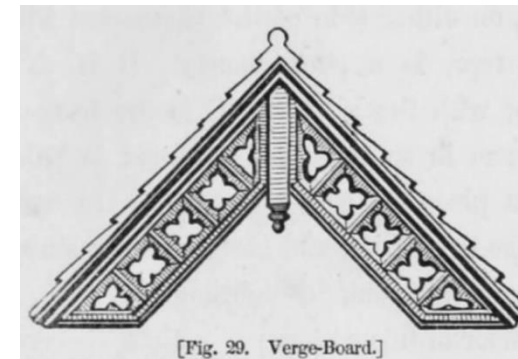
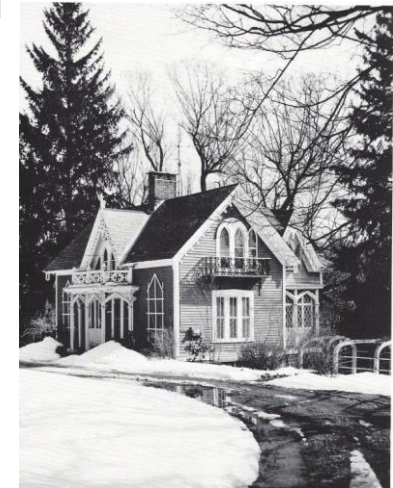
Although the architect of Miss Smiley's cottage is unknown, it is clearly influenced by Downing's book.

Characteristics of the Gothic Revival style:

- Steeply pitched roofs - typically a side-gabled roof with a prominent center gable
- Gables commonly have decorative verge boards
- Windows often extend into the gables, frequently pointed-arch windows (Gothic)
- Wall surface extends into the gable without break
- One-story porch, commonly supported by flattened Gothic arches
- Polychromed – a small percent of Gothic Revival style houses show distinctive linear patterns – bands of contrasting color or texture.



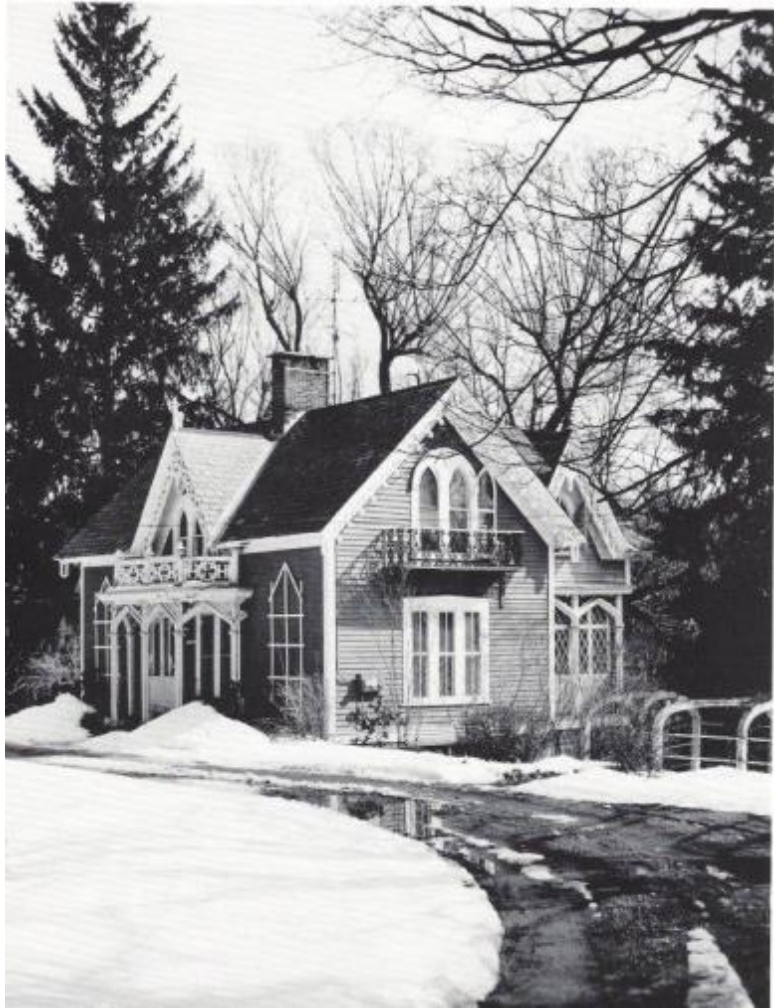
PRINCIPAL FLOOR  
Fig. 28



[Fig. 29. Verge-Board.]

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Sarah Smiley may have had an affinity for the Gothic Revival style. She may have been exposed to it during her travels to England or she may have been attracted to the style because its association with godly structures.

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## Charles W. Brackett (1892 – 1969)



In January 1921, Charles W. Brackett, purchased the cottage from the Society for the Home Study of Scripture and Church History, which he had rented since 1919. He had previously purchased extensive property along Excelsior Avenue surrounding the cottage in June 1920.

He was the son of Senator Edgar T. Brackett.

He was educated at Williams College and Harvard Law School.

He joined the Allied Expeditionary Force during World War I. He was awarded the French Medal of Honor.

He wrote several novels and became the *New Yorker* magazine drama critic.

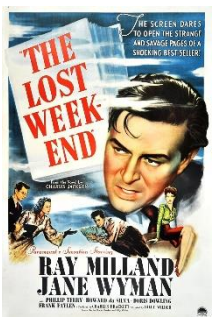
He became a screenwriter.

He partnered with Billy Wilder on 16 films including *Sunset Boulevard*, *The Lost Weekend* and many others.

Together they won Academy Awards for the scripts of *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Lost Weekend*.

His script for *Titanic* (1953) won him another Academy Award.

He received an Honorary Oscar for Lifetime Achievement in 1958.



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## Daniel Jewett, Jr.



Charles Brackett mostly likely built the two accessory structures in a similar style in 1921 based on tax research.

In December 1968, prior to his death in March of 1969, he sold the property to Daniel M. Jewett, Jr.

The Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation listed the property on the its endangered property list in 1998.

The Foundation over the past 20 years has attempted to assist the current owner.

The Foundation sought a Determination of Eligibility for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The condition of the property continues to deteriorate and there is concern that the heirs of the current owner will not have an interest in preserving the structures.

It is currently not located in a Historic District or an Architectural Review District, therefore there is NO review for demolition or new construction.



## Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register

**C: Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possesses high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.**

The building at 166 Excelsior Avenue is architecturally significant as a rare and substantially intact of frame, Gothic Revival style cottage architecture in the city of Saratoga Springs. Constructed in 1872, the 1 ½ story, clapboard sheathed residence incorporates many of the design and decorative elements espoused by Andrew Jackson Downing as set forth in his influential pattern book, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, first published in 1844. The cottage was one of the first private residences built in the proposed Excelsior Park, and is the earliest extant building remaining from this ultimately unsuccessful venture. Exhibiting Gothic Revival form and embellishments illustrated in Downing, the cottage is distinguished (although late) example of its type, period and method of construction and a rare building type in Saratoga Springs. Flanked by a pair of later dependencies exhibiting compatible architectural form and details, the cottage remains an important example of the Gothic Revival residential architecture clearly inspired by a specific pattern book design.

First occupied by Quaker educator and preacher Sarah F. Smiley and later by writer Charles W. Brackett the cottage at 166 Excelsior Avenue derives additional significance as the seasonal residence of individuals prominent in the history of the spa community.



New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau  
Pebbles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189

518-237-8643

May 23, 2006

Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation  
P.O. Box 442  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866  
ATTN: Carrie Woerner, Executive Director

re: National Register inquiry  
Gothic Revival Cottage  
Saratoga Springs, Saratoga Co.

Dear Ms. Woerner:

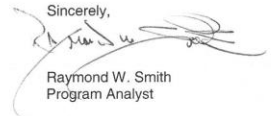
Thank you for contacting the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) regarding the property noted above. We have evaluated the documentation you provided relative to the Gothic Revival cottage located at 166 Excelsior Avenue. Based upon available information, it is the opinion of the SHPO that the cottage property meets the criteria for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Enclosed please find our resource evaluation summary for the property in question.

Your letter request of May 15 was accompanied by draft documentation in support of a National Register nomination for the Gothic Revival cottage. As you are aware from our discussion, our office requires that a signed statement of owner support be received before a nomination proposal is scheduled for formal review by the State Board for Historic Preservation.

We hope that your organization will be successful in obtaining the property owner's consent to State and National Register listing. In the interim, we will retain the documentation submitted for this property for further review and processing once the necessary owner consent is received.

We hope that the enclosed eligibility determination is sufficient for your immediate purposes. Please call me at 237-8543 ext. 3260 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

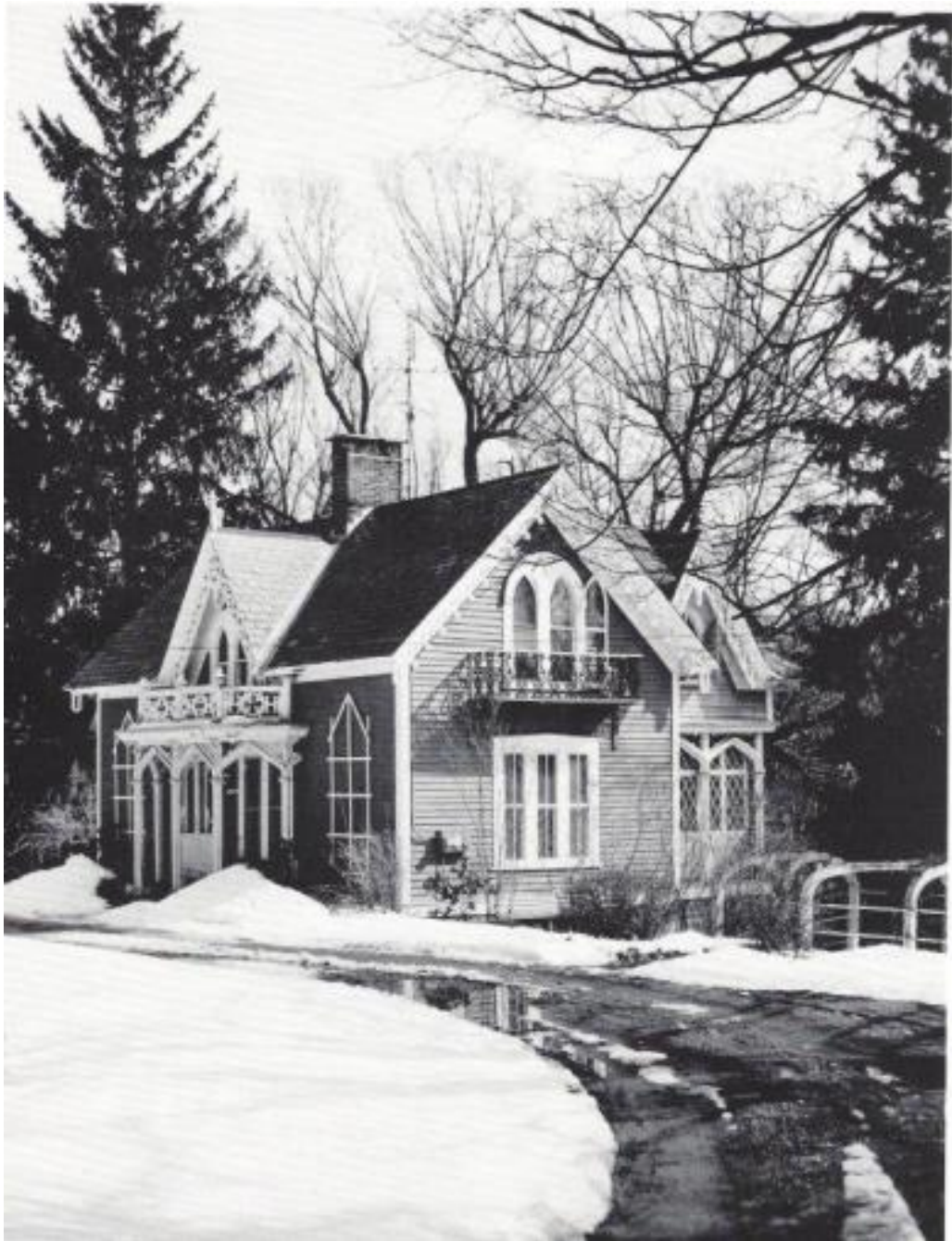
  
Raymond W. Smith  
Program Analyst

encl.

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